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Putting an Emphasis on Local and Healthy Living

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ABSTRACT

Local First is an organization located in Grand Rapids, Michigan, that works to promote a lifestyle built upon local product consumption. Local First works with a wide variety of companies to achieve this goal and is not limited to one specific area of the market. Four students from Grand Valley State University have teamed up with Local First to address and improve areas in need of attention. Nutrition, Diversity, and public awareness of Local First are current areas described as needing improvement by both the students and the Local First executive assistant. Students designed, printed, and distributed a brochure specifically focused on increasing public awareness of the importance of eating nutritional food, as well as how to do so through local food sources. Determining what information is most effective for the limited space a brochure offers is one of the challenge we dealt with during the early design stages of the project. Despite the initial success of the brochure, further work is needed with Local First in order to keep expanding on the importance of nutritional eating achieved locally. Future partners should focus on working with more Local First partners (restaurant owners, farmers, local market owners, etc...) in order to provide the Grand Rapids community with more options on where to obtain nutritional local food.

INTRODUCTION

Healthy living is often accompanied by healthy eating. Gary Nabhan, an agricultural ecologist and ethnobotanist, believes that 'human suffering is triggered by the onset of diabetes, heart disease, food allergies, and many forms of diet-driven inflammation' (Nabhan 1). Diabetes, a disease that continues to grow, has been diagnosed in 21 million people here in the United States in 2014 (CDC Diabetes Statistics 2014). Pursuing down a path of poor eating habits will only result in a nation plagued by significant health issues and rising costs of healthcare. "More than one-sixth of the U.S. economy is devoted to health care spending and that percentage continues to rise every year" (America's Health Insurance Plans). The need for change is immensely apparent and should begin by further educating the public about the benefits of choosing healthy alternatives and where to find them. By choosing to eat local foods, consumers have more control and knowledge over what goes in to the foods they eat. Increasing the business for local farmers and food providers will also make it easier for expansion in the long term, allowing for more variety among the locally grown food as demand increases. This is a task that calls the community in to action, working with organizations of all kinds in order to overcome the health issues throughout the entire nation. Local First, an organization based around the country with a branch located in Grand Rapids, MI, works to make finding and buying local products an easy and accommodating process by providing avenues to find and reach out to local growers, owners, and product producers.

With over 800 businesses a part of the organization, a website directory, local events, and a friendly staff, Local First

strives to improve the quality of the local economy and do away with the negative stigma that buying locally is difficult and/or expensive. In working with Local first, our group hopes to emphasize the benefits of the organization and improve upon areas in need. In an interview with Local First's executive assistant, our team was able to discuss and identify opportunities for improvement. The organization does a great job of working with businesses to boost the local economy through holding events, advertising local owners, and providing benefits to those a part of the organization. However, they have expressed that an emphasis on diversity, healthy eating, and brand awareness, are areas to improve upon.

FRAMING THE ISSUE

Unfortunately, the needs of Local First cannot be solved with one project. It will take a collaboration of ideas and changes to the specific workings of the organization before their goals may be achieved. We took inspiration from our Liberal Studies 342 – Food Matters lectures/discussions on the Downtown Market in order to better understand some of the issues currently going on within the city of Grand Rapids. 'The Downtown Market is located in one of the poorest areas of Grand Rapids and is identified as a driver of gentrification' (Lake & Sisson 1). The market was designed to appeal to the diversified areas of Grand Rapids, and provide an easy way of obtaining nutritious food. However, in practice it was found ineffective, and even harmful to those it was intended for due to the high cost of food and space that was left unused. Levi Gardner, a local food activist wrote *Why we need to start talking honestly about the Downtown Market* and

discusses the issues the market is facing, as well as potential solutions. Gardner believes that the market needs to be more open to local growers and partners, allowing them to offer their produce and products. We felt that we should follow an approach that helps to highlight some of Gardner's suggestions by emphasizing the importance on local growers and food providers when considering what areas Local First are in need of attention, and how we should help to improve them!

As a team, we observed and reviewed what Local First offers Grand Rapids through discussions with the Local First staff and research done on the organization through their website. As we learned more about the organization we began to appreciate just how much Local First does for Grand Rapids through being a prominent positive force that looks to improve the livelihood of the community it is so proudly apart of. Focusing on the food habits, the health of the community is not as prevalent in the organization as we hoped it would be. We identified 3 main areas in need of improvement:

(1) Overall health of the community is an area that is important to consider and improve on when deciding what can be done to better serve them. On average, in the year 2013, there were 24 diabetes-related deaths and 66 deaths due to heart disease per day in the state of Michigan alone (Michigan Department of Health & Human Services).

(2) A focus on diversity inclusion is lacking and needs to be addressed considering the African American and Hispanic populations

make up over 35% of the Grand Rapids community (Michigan 2010 Census).

(3) Additionally, Local First needs to improve brand recognition. While the organization offers an open policy to sharing information with the public, there is a need to improve public perception in regards to what Local First does, how they operate, and why.

IDEATION

Taking into account these facts about Local First and the three areas we hoped to improve on, we began to brainstorm ideas that would provide the most benefit for the organization. Discussions were conducted in our group of four students to identify what would have the largest impact for the time and resources spent. In close collaboration with Local First's executive assistant, many of the initial ideas came into better focus. Three of the ideas were best suited to address areas of need within the organization, while staying in line with Local First's mission of local growth, were chosen for our proposal.

The three ideas proposed, a brochure, a food market, and a donation drive, were broken down in order to determine the single best option for the Local First organization. Brochures provide an easy and effective way of distribute information to a large community of people. A study conducted in 2010 by Bently University found that 75% of the people interviewed found brochures to be a useful informational resource (The Statistics Behind Brochure Distribution Success, Professor Ian Cross, Bently University). A food market, specifically focused around providing food to an area of Grand Rapids that is considered to be a food desert, allows Local First to work di-

rectly with the underprivileged and improve their eating habits. There is a strong correlation between those in poverty and being overweight, leading to the belief that food deserts are to blame. Walker *et al.* in their article '*Disparities and access to healthy food in the United States: A review of food deserts literature*', discuss their findings on how location can affect the health of a community (Walker *et al.*, 2010). "It is believed that the lowest income neighborhoods had nearly 30% less supermarkets than the highest income neighborhoods" (Weinberg 2), leading to less affordable, nutritional food to be available to underserved communities. However, running and preparing a food market would cost a great deal of time due to the planning and organizing involved. Lastly, a donation drive may provide Local First with additional funding to continue operating as it currently does, but the impact such an event will have on the community as a whole is not clear.

After proposing the three ideas to the Local First executive assistant, we began to weigh the pros and cons of each. Both time and effectiveness were taken into account as two determining factors. While the second idea would provide direct interaction between Local First farmers and individuals located in a diversified and underprivileged part of Grand Rapids, it is only a short-term solution and does not provide a long lasting effect and was ruled out. The third idea was also ruled out based on potential effectiveness. We also felt that conveying information about Local First while asking for donations would only appeal to those willing to donate, which already greatly limits the amount of people we

would reach out to. Ultimately we decided on our first idea, making a brochure that advertised Local First with an emphasis on nutrition. We came to this decision based on Local First's contributions, as well as our own. We felt that an educational brochure was the best way to reach a large community of people, informing, and ideally helping to improve upon at least two of Local First's areas in need of improvement. Creating a brochure helps us to address the nutritional needs of the community, while spreading the Local First brand to members of the community. It also allows us to do so in such a way that we are able to reflect and apply knowledge developed through readings and discussions from our Food Matters course at Grand Valley State University. Touching on the ideas of Raj Patel from, *Stuffed and Starved*, we can bring to light the importance of eating food in the ideal portion sizes (Patel 2008), as well as what types of food should be desired for a healthy life style, addressed by David Bender in *Nutrition; A Very Short Introduction* (Bender, 2014).

PROJECT PLANS

The projected features of the brochure include; local businesses that offer healthy alternatives to fast food restaurants, nutritional fun facts, recipes, and information that communicates the goals of Local First. The inclusion of each of the criteria were determined by the students to be the most useful in advertising healthy awareness through food sources, recipes, and nutritional information that the reader may not have been aware of prior to reading. 6 Eight, A Moveable Feast, and Harmony Brewing Company are three businesses we wanted to include in the brochure. All

three offer a unique way of providing nutritional food sources to the community, from herbal tea's to fresh made pizza! Local First also offers an informative article that is published each week titled 'Eat Local', which provides information on a healthy food of the week. These articles are a great resource for people to use in order to find other healthy recipes for food that they may not be actively eating. As such, we will include a link and short description on the brochure to help increase the audience and further inform the public.

Designing the final product was a collaborative effort between our team members, Local First, and their partners. The brochures are featured in businesses, which are part of Local First, as well as at their local office. One of the greatest benefits of a brochure is the availability that it allows for. The goal of this project is to provide a better knowledge and understanding of local nutrition and the benefits that eating locally offers to members of the Grand Rapids community. Helping others to reach a state of more active consumption, to where the community directly interacts with its food suppliers, is what food activists like Wendell Berry, author of *The Pleasures of Eating*, believe is the key component to maintaining a healthy lifestyle on an individual level, as well as a vibrant community.

RESULTS

The design of the brochure was altered slightly in order to better represent Local First and to not include 6 eight in the 'organizations' section. Unfortunately, we did not hear back from 6 eight so we did not receive their inclusion approval. However, this gave us more room to further discuss the nutritional benefits that both A Moveable Feast and Harmony Brewing

Company offer to their customers. The final brochure, (see **Appendix A**), was then reviewed by both the Local First executive assistant and our course professor before printing. Initially fifty brochures were printed and distributed. The brochure was made available at the Local First office in Grand Rapids, as well as both Harmony Brewing Company and A Moveable Feast.

Currently, it is too early to truly measure the effectiveness of the brochure. However, the brochure was designed to reach out to a large target audience, the local Grand Rapids population, and bring attention to the issues of public health and local economies. A few details were added on in order to strengthen the reception of the brochure based upon information provided by Business Know-How in '11 Ways to Make Your Brochure Effective'. A short informal survey was conducted in order to determine the understanding of the brochure's information, what was done well, and what needed further improvement. The informal survey was conducted through convenience sampling by asking random participants within the area of Grand Rapids to take a look at the brochure and answer a few questions. Fifteen volunteers in total participated in giving feedback.

The questionnaire included five questions, with responses being limited to an ordinal scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is undesired and 5 is desired. The five questions included: (1) How well do you feel you understand the information provided by the brochure? (2) After reading the brochure, how likely are you to eat at one of the organizations advertised? (3) After reading the brochure, how likely are you to try out of one the recipes provided? (4) After read-

ing the brochure, how likely are you to put more focus on what you eat and how to improve upon it? (5) How much do you feel your knowledge and awareness about Local first was increased after reading the brochure?

Figure 1 displays the information compiled from the survey, where the responses of each participant are displayed according to the question asked and the rating given.

FIGURE 1. SURVEY DATA TABLE

Rating Scale	Question 1.	Question 2.	Question 3.	Question 4.	Question 5.
5	15	8	5	7	12
4	0	4	3	7	3
3	0	3	6	0	0
2	0	0	1	1	0
1	0	0	0	0	0

Based on the information gathered from this small survey, we concluded that the section featuring the recipes, was not as effective as intended. This may be addressed in the future by first finding recipes that are more appealing to the audience, as well as providing visuals of the finished products from the recipes. Both of these suggestions were gathered from participants who were willing to voice their opinions. Overall, the brochure was well received and a majority of the participants benefited significantly from the information provided.

CHALLENGES

One of the main obstacles of working with a brochure is the amount of information the creators is limited too. Offering only a two-sided 8.5x11 sheet of paper, the information on the brochure must be condensed and generalized in order to get the primary points across in such a small area. The space also limits the inclusion factor. With only room to include one panel of the brochure, we were limited in the number of organizations we could ask to be included. Designing the brochure also required us to educate ourselves on what makes for an effective and appealing brochure. Gathering information to apply to our brochure from other brochures and marketing websites was a challenge in that it pushed us to work in the unfamiliar fields of marketing and design.

Distribution is another primary challenge. The brochure needed to be located in areas that are likely to be seen by many people and be eye-catching enough to make them want to grab one. One struggle was the ability to place the brochure in businesses outside of the Local First organization and their affiliates. Reaching out to

local food markets to advertise the brochure is something that the organization may want to consider in the future, as the local markets are founded upon distributing the types of local foods that the brochure works to bring attention too!

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

The project for our brochure is primarily completed, but we will be keeping in close contact with Local First in order to receive further feedback on its effectiveness. In time, we will have a much better idea of how effective the brochure has been at being distributed and appreciated by the Grand Rapids community. The hope is that Local First may continue to use the brochure our team has designed as a source for those interested in finding out ways to stay healthy while enjoying the benefits of eating locally. Future students who plan to work with Local First may even find some use in using the brochure as a template for a new design, taking what was found to be most effective and replacing what was not.

Taking into account the small success we experienced from those who read the brochure and given us feedback, we consider the brochure to be a success in the context of our collaborative college course effort. Feedback generated by readers reflects that they have more interest in reading about nutritional benefits and where to find food sources for healthy food, as opposed to recipes. Based on feedback, we believe it would be advantageous to remove the recipe portion of the brochure and further elaborate on the local organizations that provide nutritious meals and what makes those meals nutritious! Working with Local First has been a wonderful experience and has opened our eyes to

what buying local foods has to offer. We hope to see that our project has helped to share with the people of Grand Rapids what we have learned about local eating from working with Local First and local businesses, resulting in a more educated and healthy community!

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APPENDIX A.



Local First

Is a non-profit organization that leads the development of an economy grounded in local ownership that meets the basic needs of people, builds local wealth and social capital, functions in harmony with our ecosystem, and encourages joyful community.



Local isn't a place, it is people. It's reintegrating our lives, connecting in practical ways with the people we live and work with. Local First is another way of saying "People first."



Local isn't just a place on a map. It's people: your neighbors and their families, their businesses, farms, nonprofits, events, and recreational venues. Local is a community and all of the opportunities we create together and challenges we work to overcome. Local First has a passion for people living and working together in sustainable community.

When we say local, we mean:

- ✓ Locally Owned
- ✓ Headquartered in West Michigan
- ✓ Privately Held (not traded on the stock market)

By eating locally, you will:

- ✓ Support our farmers
- ✓ Strengthen our local economy
- ✓ Ensure that you receive high quality food
- ✓ Cultivate community
- ✓ Eat sustainably while increasing healthy options

Why Local First?

1. **Local First Engages.** It creates and deepens relationships within a community, which becomes more vibrant through collaboration and mutual investment.
2. **Local First Humanizes.** Physical and economic development occur on a scale that nurtures people and encourages beauty in natural and manmade environments.
3. **Local First Preserves.** When more citizens are genuine stakeholders, protecting local economic and environmental value is of mutual interest.
4. **Local First Strengthens.** When citizens and local businesses work together, it catalyzes positive development and the community has structural integrity to withstand economic downturns.
5. **Local First Invests.** Sustainable local economies and ecosystems grow into markets that are greater than the sum of their parts.
6. **Local First Encourages.** Intimate connections between customers and businesses facilitate innovation, interaction, and discovery, making for a more vibrant and resilient local economy.
7. **Local First Enriches.** Reinvesting success in customers, employees, and the local environment makes the entire community wealthier.

Contact Us

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955 Wealthy St. S.E.

Grand Rapids, MI 49506

Localfirst.com/eat-local

Eat Locally

Eat Nutritiously



Featured Business

Discover and shop at locally-owned, entrepreneurial businesses that invest in their community through the Triple Bottom Line of people, planet, and profit.



Harmony Brewing Company, located in Grand Rapids at 1551 Lake Dr Se, offers rustic wood fired pizzas, with hand prepared dough and a unique twist. Goat cheese is used instead of cheese from cow's milk, providing more flavor with less fat and fewer calories. A great way to enjoy a pizza while still staying within a healthy diet!

Contact: (616) 233-0063



A Moveable Feast is a Grand Rapids based food truck serving delicious food made using only the highest quality ingredients, with an emphasis on local producers and responsible production methods.

Contact: (616) 401-8574

Recipes

Dinosaur Kale with Baby Potatoes

Ingredients

- 2 cups vegetable or chicken stock
- 2 cups water
- 1 pound baby potatoes of various colors
- 3 Tbsp olive oil, divided
- 1 pound dinosaur kale or Swiss chard, chopped roughly
- 3 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1/2 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- Salt and black pepper
- Grated zest of a lemon
- Lemon juice to taste

Preparation

Bring the stock and water to a boil and add the potatoes. Turn the heat down to simmer gently until the potatoes are tender, about 20-30 minutes. Drain; you can reserve the stock and water to cook rice or polenta with later! and coat the potatoes with 1 tablespoon olive oil, salt well and set aside.

Heat the remaining olive oil in a large saute pan over medium-high heat for 1-2 minutes. Add the kale and turn to coat with the oil as it wilts. Add the garlic and toss to combine, then add the red pepper flakes and some salt and black pepper. Stir-fry this for 2 minutes, then turn off the heat and cover the pan. Wait 2-4 minutes before uncovering. To serve, mix the lemon zest with the kale. Lay down a "nest" of kale on the plate and arrange the baby potatoes in the center. Squeeze some lemon juice over everything right as you serve.

Recipe courtesy of Simply Recipes

Carrot Salad with Honey-Lemon Dressing

Ingredients

- 2 Tbsp walnut oil or canola oil
- 2 Tbsp lemon juice
- 1 Tbsp honey
- 1 small shallot, minced
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/4 tsp freshly ground pepper
- 2 cups shredded carrots (about a medium)
- 1 cup peeled and shredded celery root
- 1/4 cup golden raisins
- 1/4 cup chopped walnuts, toasted

Preparation

Whisk oil, lemon juice, honey, shallot, salt and pepper in a large bowl. Add carrots, celery root, raisins and walnuts, toss to combine.

Recipe courtesy of Eating Well